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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
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INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000489

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE/BELGRADE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [KHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: NEW WAQF DIRECTOR, BUT NO POLICY CHANGE OVER
MUGHRABI GATE RAMP

REF: A. JERUSALEM 443
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 291

CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING PRINCIPAL OFFICER THOMAS M. DUFFY, PER REASONS 1.
4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: THE NEW DIRECTOR OF THE WAQF SAID MARCH 13 THAT ISLAMIC AUTHORITY WILL CONTINUE TO OPPOSE EXCAVATIONS AT THE MUGHRABI GATE RAMP AND THE EVENTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW RAMP THERE. HE SAID THAT LIKE HIS PREDECESSOR, NEITHER HE NOR ANY WAQF OFFICIAL WILL MEET WITH JERUSALEM'S MAYOR OR ANY GOI OFFICIAL, BELIEVING THAT ANY SUCH MEETING WOULD SIGNAL WAQF ACQUIESCENCE WITH THE GOIS PLAN. HE ALSO SAID HE WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS ABOUT A PERMIT FOR THE NEW RAMP NOR SEND AN OFFICIAL TO OVERSEE THE EXCAVATIONS, FOR SIMILAR REASONS. HE EXPRESSED CONCERNS THAT VIOLENCE COULD ERUPT AGAIN IF THE EXCAVATIONS ARE NOT HALTED. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) NEWLY-APPOINTED WAQF DIRECTOR AZAM AL-KHATIB TOLD POLOFF MARCH 13 THAT, WHILE THE JORDANIAN GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO RETIRE FORMER WAQF DIRECTOR ADNAN HUSSEINI CAME AS A SURPRISE TO HIM, THE WAQF'S STANCE ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT THE MUGHRABI GATE HAS NOT CHANGED SINCE HE REPLACED HUSSEINI MARCH 2. AL-KHATIB HAS WORKED AT THE WAQF FOR 33 YEARS AND SAID THE WAQF CONTINUES TO OPPOSE ALL EXCAVATIONS AND CONSTRUCTION PLANS, WHICH HE SAID THREATENS THE SITE'S ISLAMIC IDENTITY AND THREATENS TO ALLOW "RADICAL SETTLERS" ACCESS TO THE HARAM A-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT. HE CALLED FOR A COMPLETE HALT TO EXCAVATIONS AND CONSTRUCTION PLANS.

[1](#)3. (C) AL-KHATIB SAID THE WAQF REMAINS UNWILLING TO MEET WITH JERUSALEM MAYOR URI LUPOLIANSKI, WHO TABLED PLANS FEBRUARY 11 FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW MUGHRABI GATE RAMP PENDING PUBLIC PERMIT HEARINGS (REFTEL B). AL-KHATIB SAID NO WAQF OFFICIAL WILL PARTICIPATE IN THESE HEARINGS, NOR WILL ANY OBSERVE THE EXCAVATIONS, BECAUSE DOING SO WOULD IMPLY WAQF ACQUIESCENCE TO THE UNDERTAKING. HE SAID THE "TIME FOR TALK" PASSED, ADDING THAT HUSSEINI HAD SENT SEVEN LETTERS TO LUPOLIANSKI ABOUT THE ISSUE BEFORE EXCAVATIONS BEGAN AND RECEIVED NO RESPONSE, THOUGH LUPOLIANSKI USED THE LETTERS TO SUGGEST THE EXCAVATIONS HAD BEEN COORDINATED WITH THE WAQF.

[1](#)4. (C) DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE WAQF YUSUF NATSHEH TOLD POLOFF MARCH 13 THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE USING ARCHAEOLOGY FOR POLITICAL OBJECTIVES, WHICH AL-KHATIB REFERRED TO AS THE "ISRAELIZATION OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM." NATSHEH SAID THE MESSAGE THE GOI IS SENDING IS THAT THE CITY'S JEWISH PAST IS VALUED WHILE THE ISLAMIC PAST IS NOT. AL-KHATIB SAID HE WORRIES SUCH ATTITUDES THREATEN TO RENEW VIOLENT PROTESTS, WHICH HAVE TAPERED OFF. HE SAID CONTINUED WORK AT THE SITE COULD RE-IGNITE TENSIONS, WHICH HE CALLED "EMBERS UNDER ASHES."

15. (C) (COMMENT: WHILE SOURCES AMONG THE WAQF STAFF TOLD
POLOFF MARCH 13 THAT THEY BELIEVE HUSSEINI WAS RETIRED
BECAUSE HE WAS TOO AGGRESSIVE WITH THE GOI REGARDING THE
MUGHRABI GATE RAMP ISSUE, AL-KHATIB MAY IN FACT BE EVEN MORE
RIGID THAN HUSSEINI. WHILE HUSSEINI EXPRESSED A WILLINGNESS
TO SEND AN OBSERVER TO THE EXCAVATIONS, AL-KHATIB IS
UNWILLING TO COOPERATE WITH ISRAELI OFFICIALS ON ANY ASPECT
OF THE EXCAVATIONS AND CONSTRUCTION UNTIL THE EXCAVATIONS ARE
COMPLETELY HALTED. END COMMENT.)

DUFFY